

Community Perception of the Brookline Police Department Walk and Talk Program

Preliminary Report

Introduction

The Walk and Talk program is a community-oriented policing program of Brookline Police Department (BPD) officers in the Brookline Housing Authority (BHA) community in order to develop a relationship with the residents. A paper survey was developed by a subcommittee of the Select Board's Committee on Policing Reforms in consultation with BHA staff. The survey was available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian and was disseminated by mail to all 808 BHA residents' addresses provided by BHA staff to assess public perceptions of the Walk and Talk program. Although 808 surveys were disseminated, 38 were returned to sender so the study population is 770, and with 70 responses gives a 9% response rate.

The survey collected both qualitative and quantitative data investigating perception of the program, perceptions of the officers participating in the program, and frequency and quality of interactions with the officers. The 70 responses were collected and input into a google form where analytics were performed.

Demographics

Brookline Housing Authority houses over 800 residents across 12 different residential complexes. With respect to race and ethnicity, 56% of residents identify as white, 25% identify as Black/African-American, 14% identify as Asian, and 15% identify as Latino/Hispanic. 66% of residents identify as female and 34% identify as male. In regard to age, 56% of BHA residents identify as 65+. Of the 70 responses received, approximately 2/3 were from women and approximately 1/3 were from men which is directly representative of the study population gender demographics. The majority of the responses were from residents over the age of 65 (n=41) and 51-64 years old (n=12). There was a wide range of responses in regard to how long the residents were living in BHA properties. Approximately 1/4 of responses were from each of the following ranges, 20+ years, 10-20 years, and 1-5 years (n=18, 18, 19 respectively). Half of the responses received were from residents who identified as White/European American (n=32) and about 1/4 identified as Asian/Asian American (n=14). There were six responses from residents who self-identified as Black/African American and six responses from residents who identified as Hispanic/Latinx.

Public Perception and Interactions with the Officers

A majority of the residents were familiar with the officers in the Walk and Talk unit of the BPD (n=36). Approximately 20% of the respondents had seen the officers at least once a month (n= 15) but the majority of respondents interacted with the officers a few times per year or less frequently (n=38). When asked about how often they personally interact with the officers, only a few residents said that

they interact with them on a semi-frequent basis of at least once a month (n=6) whereas most residents had few, if any, interactions with the officers within the past year (n= 49). Most interactions residents had with the officers were either social, the officer provided information, or the officer had assisted in a non-criminal issue (n=12, n=6, n=14). Few were actually in relation to any sort of police-activity (n= 4).

75% of respondents felt satisfied or very satisfied with the professionalism of the officers (n=30). A majority of residents agree or strongly that the officers have a good relationship with the residents, feel the program makes BHA communities safer, and would like to see the program continue. Most residents do not feel uncomfortable by the presence of the officers in BHA housing. Across the board, the community would like to see the presence of the Walk and Talk officers remain the same or increase at the events held within BHA residencies and would like to see an increase in the number of officers in the Walk and Talk program.

Qualitative data provided many nice sentiments about the officers, naming and thanking some of them individually. Some of those comments included "They are kind in times of crisis - nonjudgmental to my family" and "I think as a BHA resident ; the "Walk and Talk" program should stay because it's a great program specially for our kids. Officer Tim is a great person and the kids and us love him. All Officers are wonderful and so helpful for our community." There were a significant number of responses saying they were unfamiliar with the program and/or would like to learn more about it. There was much sentiment related to enjoying the program but wishing there were more interactions and community engagement with the officers, such as "The officers should engage more with members of the community directly and not simply "drive through" the BHA" and "I feel it's important for them to be just "hanging out" in a fun friendly manor at family and youth events, so that their presence in the community isn't feared or looked down upon".

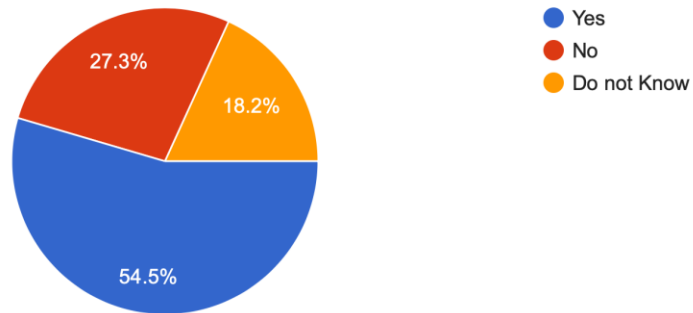
Limitations

While the data received through this survey has been informative in regard to the Walk and Talk program, there are some limitations that could limit the scope and interpretation of the data. Since the majority of residents who responded to the survey were above the age of 65, this primarily captures the sentiments of the older BHA residents and might not accurately reflect the thoughts and experiences of the younger residents such as families and children. It was also predominantly answered by residents who self-identified as white, limiting the applicability to the more marginalized racial groups within BHA. There was also an "other" section on the "How would you describe your race?" question that allowed respondents free text answers in conjunction with the prepopulated responses. We received a variety of answers that were then difficult to include in the rest of the analytics as there was only one response from multiple free text answers. One of the largest limitations is that many of the respondents did not answer all of the questions. Since it was a paper survey, some people were unaware there was a back and subsequently did not respond to those questions.

Appendix

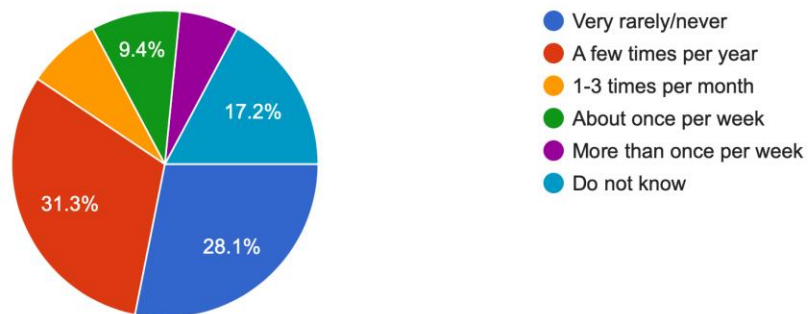
Are you familiar with the officers from the Brookline Police Department's "Walk and Talk" Unit?
(Officer Tim Stephenson, Officer Michelle Lawlor, Officer David Pilgrim and Officer Kristen Healy)

66 responses



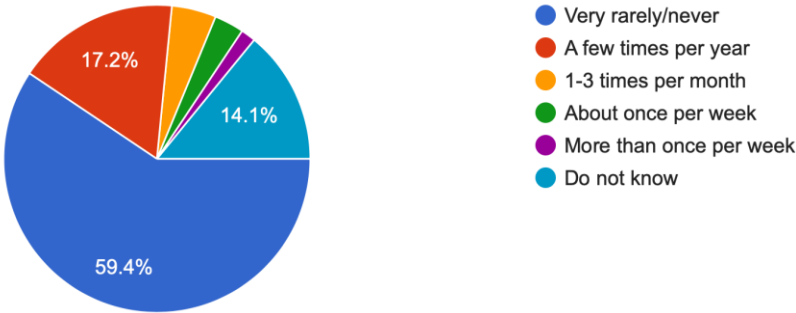
How often do you see "Walk and Talk" officers in the BHA community?

64 responses



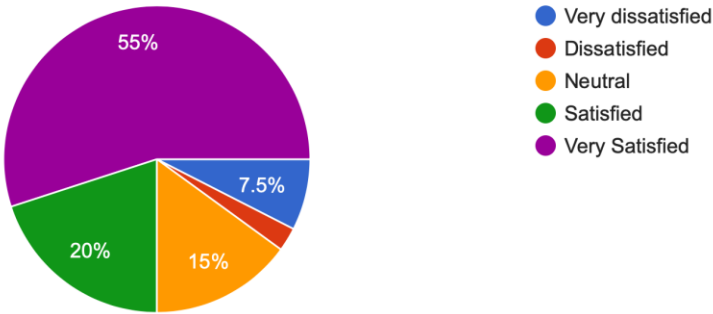
How often have you personally interacted with "Walk and Talk" officers (Tim, Michelle, David, Kristin)?

64 responses

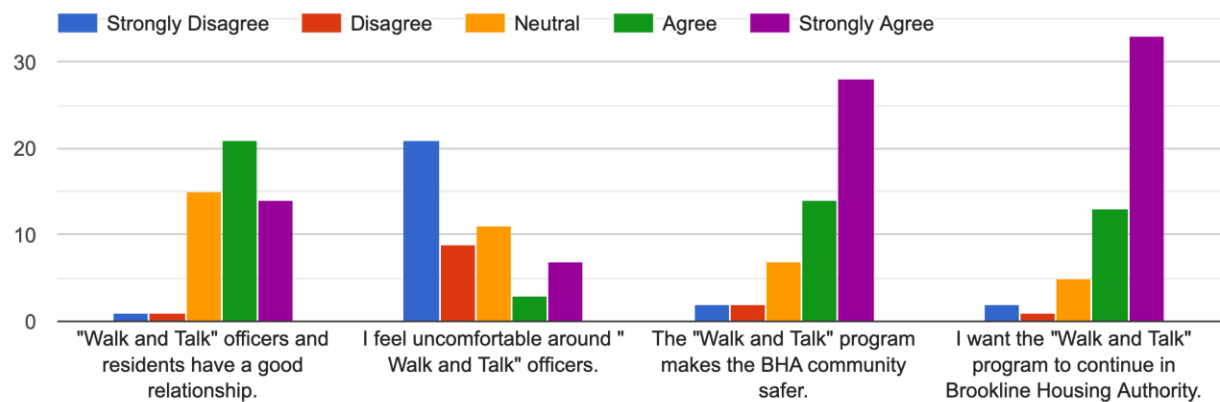


Thinking about your last interaction with a "Walk and Talk" officer, which of the following best describes how you feel about the officer's professionalism? Please leave blank if not applicable.

40 responses



For the next set of questions, please consider your experiences with "Walk and Talk" officers



Thinking about the "Walk and Talk" program, what changes (if any) would you like to see?

